Central Public Library
Eighth and K Streets NW
Mount Vernon Square
Washington
District of Columbia

HABS No. DC-457

HABS
DC,
WASH,
551-

PHOTOGRAPHS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

Washington Public Library

HABS No. DC-457

Addendum to:
Central Public Library
Eighth and K Streets, NW
Mt. Vernon Square
Washington
District of Columbia

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7172

HABS DC, WASH, 551-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WASHINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY
(Central Public Library, Carnegie Public Library)

HABS No. DC-457

Location: Mount Vernon Square, bounded by 7th, 9th, K St., and Mount Vernon Place, NW, Washington, DC.

Present Owner: Trustees of the University of the District of Columbia.

Present Occupant: Graduate Library and Trustees' and President's Office, University of the District of Columbia.

Significance: Located on Mount Vernon Square at the intersection of several vistas created by the L'Enfant Plan, this library was the first public building in the Beaux Arts style in Washington. Funded by donations from Andrew Carnegie, it was one of the more monumental of the 1,679 Carnegie libraries in the United States. The Washington Public Library, completed in 1902, served as the Central Public Library until 1970.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1899-1902. The implementing legislation of March 3, 1899, stipulated that the building be completed within three years, but due to delays with the steelwork, the building was not occupied until December, 1902. The formal dedication was January 7, 1903. The cornerstone was laid on April 23, 1901.

2. Architects: Ackerman and Ross of New York were selected through a competition. (See p. 14 below.) Although, in announcing their selection the Star called Ackerman and Ross "a well-known New York firm," they never achieved great fame. They were a short-lived partnership, lasting from about 1897-1902. Ackerman was the senior partner, while Ross had the design capability.

   William S. Ackerman was a mechanical engineer, a graduate of the Stephens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J. For three years he was chief engineer of the National Lead Company in New York City.[1] Albert Randolph Ross (b. Westfield, Mass., October 26, 1869) worked for McKim, Mead and White for nine years. When George B. Post was asked about Ackerman and Ross, he noted Ross's experience with McKim, Mead and White and said that he had "made quite a reputation in the Beaux Arts in Paris where he was a student."[2] About a year before this competition, Ackerman and Ross won the competition to design the pedestal for the soldiers' and sailors' monument in Jersey City, for which Philip Martiny was the sculptor.

The Washington Public Library seems to have been their big break. After winning this competition, they were selected for three other Carnegie libraries, in San Diego, Nashville, and Atlanta. Although Washington's was clearly the largest and most elaborate, Atlanta's showed the same Beaux-Arts influences (see HABS No. GA-1216). Both Atlanta's and Nashville's were funded by $100,000 donations from Carnegie, while Carnegie donated $60,000 to the library in San Diego. Ackerman and Ross also won the competition for the Union County Courthouse in Elizabeth, N.J.[3]

It is not known why Ackerman and Ross dissolved their partnership, but it is clear from their correspondence during the construction of the Washington Public Library that Ross's role in the daily business of the firm increased dramatically. It may be that Ross, the designer, simply eclipsed his older partner. In the summer of 1902, Ross began writing to Green on his own letterhead, and began soliciting work without Ackerman. The most interesting of his commissions concerns the Carnegie Library at Columbus, Ohio, which is remarkably similar in appearance to the Washington Library.

Ross went on to design other libraries, but most of them smaller, such as those in Needham, Mass., Old Town, Maine, Pittsfield, Maine, and Taunton, Mass. Ross remained a member of the Architectural League of New York until 1921, when he dropped out of sight. Ackerman formed a new firm, Ackerman & Partridge, and designed a Carnegie Library for Bucknell University. This pedestrian design, published in 1904, clearly shows the lack of Ross's sophistication and Beaux-Arts sensibilities.[4]

3. Sculptor: Philip Martiny was retained, on the architects' advice, to provide the sculptural ornament. The pieces for which he was responsible included the sculptural piece over the main door, the "four boys in the attic," the Minerva heads in the pediments, and the clock piece over the delivery desk.[5]

Martiny was not part of the architects' original proposal, nor part of the original budget. In October 1900, Ackerman and Ross asked that Philip Martiny, a New York sculptor, be hired to make the models for the statuary, "as he is the only sculptor who can do this work to our satisfaction....He has just finished and cast models for our Atlanta Building which are extremely simple, viril, and beautiful."[6] Philip Martiny was an Alsatian-born sculptor who trained in Europe and then worked for Augustus Saint-Gaudens for five years. He opened his own studio and obtained a $50,000 commission from McKim, Mead and White to decorate the Agricultural Bulding at the Chicago World's Fair.[7]

Martiny was willing to make the models in plaster for $3,000.[8] The Building Superintendent, Bernard Green, replied that $3,000 was too much: "Please say to Mr. Martiny that if he will furnish all of the models for $2,000 I will give him an order...."[9] Green then had to sell this to the Library Commission. Although the Vermont Marble Co. would have made the models for $700, "I agree with the architects that a man of Mr. Martiny's ability, who would not be estimated for or employed by the marble

company, should be employed to do the work." Green described the work as "...not only five large pieces with six human figures and two heads, but many ornaments and column capitals, festoons, keystones, etc."[10]

4. Contractor, suppliers: Richardson and Burgess, a Washington firm, were the contractors. They were low bidders on the excavation and foundation contract, which was advertised on June 2, 1900. Their bid of $18,106 was selected on June 20. The rest of the construction contract was advertised on July 31. Only two firms bid, and the limit of $275,000 was exceeded by one of them. The contract went to the other, Richardson and Burgess, who agreed to erect the building in Vermont "B" white marble for $273,000. For an additional $4,000 they promised to use Milford pink granite for the basement, and this was agreed to by the Library Commission.

Other contracts that were let by the Library Commission included:

Snead & Co. Iron Works	three-tier book stack	$23,789
C.H. Muddiman & Co.	electrical fixtures	813
Marine Engine & Mach. Co.	electric elevator	2,650
Elmer Garnsey	interior painting	6,000
Philip Martiny	sculpture	2,000
Robt. Mitchell Furn. Co.	furniture	6,495

Richardson and Burgess subcontracted the structural iron work to James H. McGill, and acquired the steel from the Carnegie Steel Co. Other subcontracts that they let included:

Vermont Marble Co.	marble
Alden Speare's Sons Co.	green slate for roof
Bay State Pink Granite Co.	granite
Thos. E. Landon	plastering
National Electrical Supply Co.	electric lighting
A. S. Reavis	metal and skylight work
R. B. Caverly	plumbing
W. T. Galliher & Bro.	millwork
Jas. B. Lambie	hardware
W. W. Biggs Heating & Vent. Co.	heating and ventilation
Globe Fireproofing	terra cotta work
Hilgartner & Sons	interior marble
National Mosaic Co.	mosaic floors
Snead Iron Co.	ornamental iron work[11]

5. Original plans and construction: The program for the competition, which dictated the basic plan of the building, was presented to the Library Commission on April 14, 1899. The main design guidance that the program gave was "The Commission prefers that

the external walls be faced with marble," if possible. "Architects will, for the purposes of the competition, base their designs upon the use of marble for the exterior walls, but the Commission is not committed to the use of this material."[12] The stated preference for a white stone implied a preference for a classical building.

One distinctive design feature of the library, as built, is the vertical slot-like lighting in the rear of the building. This was mandated, in effect, by the program, which said:

> ...it may be necessary in the book-stack to depend to some extent on electric lighting....The book-stack should be as evenly lighted as possible. It is believed that this can only be accomplished with daylight by admitting it directly to every space between shelf ranges.

The program was also fairly explicit in the lay-out of the rooms:

> The book-stack should be in intimate connection and touch not only with the lending and delivery desk, conveniently placed near the main entrance on the main floor, but with the cataloguers' room, public reading room, periodical and children's reading rooms and the Librarian's office, all of which need the book store close to hand. Thus, also, the Librarian and attendants may have direct supervision of all important proceedings in the library. The cataloguers' and accessions rooms should be on the first floor close to the stack and to the receiving and packing rooms, the latter to be just below in the basement. The cataloguers' room should also adjoin a reference library, easily accessible from, if not a part of, the public reading room.

Rather than giving overall dimensions of the building, the program set out the square footage of each room. For example, the "book room" should be 6,000 sq. ft. or less, depending on how the stacks are arranged. The "lending department" (delivery counter, seats for persons waiting, suitable shelving, card catalog space) should be on the first floor and occupy 2,200 sq. ft. or more.

In requiring stacks, the program was in step with the previous decade's advances in library design. The stacks, which first appeared in the 1870s, were popularized by the Boston Public Library, which had been completed in 1895. The stacks were a metal framework, independent of the exterior masonry walls.[13] Because of the narrow passageways between the stacks, they were usually closed to the public, requiring a staff member to retrieve the books. The late requirement of an open shelf room, added between the draft and the final version of the program, shows the newest trend in library design. After surveying recently completed library buildings, a contemporary observer concluded:

> It is evident from a study of these recent buildings that the stack is not yet eliminated as a feature in library arrangements and construction. Yet it is

> noteworthy that the movement in the direction of open shelves is very well intrenched, even in those libraries which have a stack.[14]

The program required an open shelf room of 1,500 sq. ft. or more, and defined it: "This room is for the display of new books and selected classes of other books on shelves to which the public is to have unobstructed access." The limited open-shelf area would soon render this building obsolete.

One condition of the acceptance of Ackerman and Ross's design was that it be modified, due to the fact that its construction cost would exceed the $300,000 then allocated for the building. The major changes that were made concerned the size of the building and the kinds of materials. Although the Trustees reported that the size had been reduced, the dimensions changed by less than five feet: the building as proposed was approximately 224' x 112'; this was changed to 219'-10" x 111'-5".

Bernard Green, as superintendent of construction, oversaw the modification of the design as well as its execution. He gave the Commission his suggestions on how to reduce costs:

> To accomplish this the plans should be revised by a reduction of the workmanship and details of the exterior marble and granite work, so that their total cost may not exceed about $90,000; the steel construction revised as to amount of metal and workmanship; the interior marble work and mosaic of floors, and the oak wood work, ornamental iron work, and ornamental plastering reduced in quantity and cost. All bronze work should be omitted. The limestone walls in the basement should be changed to brick and plaster, and many minor items of interior treatment now represented as rich and elaborate in the drawings, simplified and made plainer, trusting somewhat more than was necessary before to effective coloring of walls and ceilings.[15]

One obvious modification was to abandon marble as the exterior material, but this is something both Green and the Commission were unwilling to do. The decision was made to use the second-grade marble.

On April 23, 1900, the Commission advertised for contractor bids. They received two, both deliberately overbid, Green said, knowing that the bids would be thrown out. Green attributed this to the fact that the exterior stonework was not reduced enough, because the architects did not have enough time. "Another cause for the high bids is doubtless due to the rather rich appearance of the drawings." Green also took some of the blame upon himself for inadequately supervising the architects:

> I have perhaps avoided more than I should, positive interference and direction in the revision of their plans to reduce cost, because they are young men and this is their first important building, over which they have worked anxiously from the

first to produce a thoroughly beautiful result.

Ackerman, who was present at the opening of the bids, "learned that the drawings must be extensively altered as to the exterior and that much plainer work and material must be adopted for the interior."[16] Green advertised for bids for the excavation and foundation while Ackerman and Ross revised their drawings.

The Trustees Report dated September 30, 1900, explained the kinds of changes that had been made to the original proposal:

> In making the revisions of the plans which have been noted no change has been permitted in the arrangement and proportionate areas of spaces in the building or in its general architectural design. The exterior stonework is somewhat plainer than originally proposed, but of a good quality of white marble, and the Milford pink granite for the basement is retained. The roof will be covered with black slate with the sheet-metal work thereon of galvanized iron, and the gutters, flashings, and flat portions are to be copper.

Shortly thereafter, Green was able to obtain green slate at a reasonable rate, so that part of the original design was restored.[17] The Trustees Report continued:

> All bronze work and all mosaic floors, except borders in the general delivery room and exhibition hall, have been omitted. White marble is retained for the stairways, but all other interior marble finish is omitted. The original elaborate stucco enrichments of ceilings, vaults, and cornices are generally omitted, but fine moldings and good forms are retained. The door and wainscot trims of the general delivery room will be in cement instead of marble. All oak wainscotting in the second story, except the trustees' room, is omitted. Metal sashes and bronze doors are altered to oak. All oak and parquetry flooring is changed to plain, hard, Southern pine. No change has been made in the original design of the heating and ventilating apparatus and electric lighting. Polished plate glass is retained for all windows. It is expected that the funds will permit a pleasing color treatment for the interior walls.[18]

One year later, Noyes, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, asked Green about obtaining a revised perspective of the building to accompany the Fourth Annual Report. Green advised against it, explaining that the design changes were minor:

> You may understand the principal changes in the exterior...by noting that the modillions in the upper cornice of the two wings are omitted and a small ornament instead is distributed along the crest of the wall. Also that the cresting ornament on the top of the central pavilion walls has been substituted by a plainer line containing fewer and simpler ornaments. The consols or small brackets shown in the original perspective just under the upper cornice of the

> central pavilion are also omitted. Otherwise, excepting of course the statues sketched on the tops of the four pedestals at the main entrance, no noticeable change has been made in the original design.[19]

The plans, though, had met with more alteration:

> Certain changes of details such as rear entrance and area on basement plan, delivery counter and shelving around central pavilion rooms on first story plan, and the pedestals indicated in memorial hall, arrangement of court skylight and shelving in rooms of central pavilion on second story plan.[20]

Generally, the original design seems to have been modified in as least detrimental a fashion as possible. The greatest changes were made in interior materials.

6. Alterations and additions: The Central Public Library was outdated almost as soon as it was completed, because of its dependence on the closed stack system. Although when the construction of the building was announced the open-shelf room was called a "notable development...a characteristic feature of the model modern library," within a few years of its construction its new librarian noted, "The library building was unfortunately built with restricted space for the displaying of books on open shelves."[21] George F. Bowerman, who had replaced the original librarian, Weston Flint, in 1904, had a much more critical view twenty years later. In a letter to the National Capital Planning Commission, he explained the problems:

> Central library -- Located about the center of population, but somewhat off usual lines of travel; access dangerous for children on account of traffic conditions. Building full to running over with books; cramped and badly arranged for the administration of a large library system. Building should be enlarged by the completion of the rectangle, and the new parts devoted to administrative purposes. This would set free for public use space in present building much needed for that purpose.[22]

No major alterations were undertaken, however, until the Public Library vacated the building and turned it over to the University of the District of Columbia for their graduate library. The University undertook a $3.5 million renovation, completed in 1980. At that time, the rear entrance was converted to the main entrance, and the front entrance is no longer used. In the main hall, the delivery counter was removed and the space was opened up to serve as an art gallery. The offices of the president and the board of trustees were installed in the former lecture room on the second floor. The original stacks were removed.

B. Historical Context

1. Establishment of the Library

Washington was without a public library until 1896. There had been private libraries, and free libraries supported by subscription, and governmental libraries, but never a free library supported by public appropriation.

After previous attempts in 1891 and 1894, Theodore Noyes finally succeeded in getting a congressional act passed which established a public library in Washington in 1896. Noyes, a crucial proponent, was an associate editor of the Evening Star who became editor in 1908. He also chaired the committee formed by the Board of Trade to study the need for a library in 1891. The Board of Trade recommended a public library, and the Star heralded the recommendation.

After five years of work, the legislation was passed, and by Act of Congress, June 3, 1896, a free public library and reading room were established in the District of Columbia. The Act provided for the establishment of a nine-member Board of Trustees, appointed by the District Commissioners, in whom the final authority for the library rested. The Commissioners were charged to designate a location, on the recommendation of the Trustees. The act carried no appropriation.

The Trustees were appointed, with Theodore W. Noyes as president. Noyes served in this position until his death fifty years and two days later. B. H. Warner, then chairman of the Board of Trade's Library Committee, and the president of the Board of Trade when it established a Library Committee in 1894, was elected vice president. In 1898, the public library received its first appropriation, $6,720 for salaries and rent. In late December, 1898, the public library opened in rented quarters at 1326 New York Avenue, NW.

Three-quarters of the books had been furnished by the Washington City Free Library, which had been established in 1895 as a subscription- supported library. It went out of existence on July 15, 1898.[23] In the First Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Public Library of the District of Columbia, the Trustees were looking toward the new municipal building as their future and permanent home.[24]

Prospects for a location for the Library changed suddenly, on January 12, 1899, when Andrew Carnegie offered to donate $250,000 for the construction of a new library building, provided that Congress furnish the site and provide "suitable maintenance," at not less than $10,000 per year. The incident was described in the Star:

> He was at the White House to-day, [Mr. Carnegie] said, waiting to see the President, when he met Mr. Warner, and Mr. Warner told him of the need of a library building in Washington. Mr. Carnegie offered at once to erect the

building at the cost of at least $250,000 if Congress would provide the site.25

2. Role of Andrew Carnegie

This was, of course, only one of many public libraries that Andrew Carnegie funded. Andrew Carnegie was born in 1835 in Dunfermline, Scotland, and after immigrating to the United States in 1846, his first job was as a bobbin boy. He rose through the ranks of the Pennsylvania Railroad, became involved in an iron-forging company in Pittsburgh, and built up the Carnegie Steel Co. until he sold it to J. P. Morgan in 1901 for nearly $500 million. Carnegie developed a philosophy of philanthropy, which held that it was the duty of the wealthy to fund projects which would help the poor to help themselves. Public libraries were a prime example: an institution which enabled the working class to educate itself.

Carnegie donated $40 million to fund the construction of 1,679 library buildings in the United States, and an additional $16 million in other English-speaking countries. His first donation was in 1886; in 1911 the Carnegie Corporation assumed this role and accepted new requests until 1917. With each donation, Carnegie required that the municipality provide a site and an annual appropriation equal to one-tenth of the cost of construction. Carnegie's money was devoted to construction; books, librarians' salaries, and maintenance were the responsibility of the locality. This insured the public investment that Carnegie felt was necessary to make his libraries broad-based.

Initially, Carnegie did not keep a tight rein on his donations. Later, though, his private secretary in charge of this program, James Bertram, produced some guidelines on library design, discouraged by the waste of Carnegie money on inadequate designs. Bertram required the approval of plans beginning in 1908. His pamphlet "Notes on the Erection of Library Bildings" (using the Simplified Spelling which Carnegie promoted) was first issued in 1911. These guidelines emphasized "economical layout," included six prototypical plans, and did not comment on exterior design.

Washington's Carnegie library was clearly outside the mainstream of Carnegie libraries. It was designed to be a monument, respecting its position in the Nation's Capital, as much as a library. Carnegie's donation eventually totalled $375,000, making it his largest single-building contribution outside of the Pittsburgh area.

Although Carnegie was often accused of choosing library construction donations as a means of enhancing his own image, actually he was somewhat self-effacing about them. He never required that the libraries be named Carnegie Libraries, as, in fact, Washington's was not -- it acquired that name only unofficially. Carnegie usually refused to appear at dedications, and he tried his best to avoid attending Washington's. He was first invited in July 1902,[26] and the Library Commission set the date for December 16. When Carnegie informed them that he could not attend that day, the

Commission rescheduled the opening, to January 7. Carnegie complained somewhat grumpily to a friend in Washington:

> It seems the Washington people will have me at the Library ceremony. I thought it would take place on the 16th as arranged and had declined. Now they have postponed it and there is nothing for me to do but to comply with their wishes. Shall see you in Washington then, middle of January.[27]

Perhaps the promised appearance of President Theodore Roosevelt at the dedication made it hard for Carnegie to refuse.

3. The Site

The site of the new library proved to be controversial. The first proposed site was on Pennsylvania Avenue where the National Archives now stands, but sentiment soon shifted to Mt. Vernon Square, at the intersection of 8th and K streets and Massachusetts and New York avenues.

In the same article that announced Carnegie's donation, the Star noted,

> The reservation at the corner of Pennsylvania avenue and Seventh street, adjacent to the market, was pointed out to Mr. Carnegie in passing as a possible site for the library building, and he expressed himself as pleased with its accessibility, conspicuousness, and architectural opportunities.[28]

The site on Pennsylvania Avenue, north of Center Market, was optimal, being vacant and owned by the federal government. Originally Reservation 7, the site had been offered to the District in 1873 by the United States, as a site for a new city hall. The city hall was never built.[29]

Not everyone was pleased with the Center Market site, however. Senator James McMillan, Chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, favored a site on Mt. Vernon Square. For a few days, arguments raged back and forth over the two proposed sites. On January 17, a Star editorial discussed, and dismissed, the Mt. Vernon Square site. The Star said that the sentiment in Congress was

> immovably opposed to the breach of trust involved in diverting the city's parks from public use as such, and covering them with bricks and mortar. This sentiment of course dominates every thoughtful Washingtonian. Once assent to the theory that these public spaces may properly be utilized in this way, and never will another public building site be purchased in Washington. The reservations will be cut up and parcelled out....[30]

On January 18, the Star reported that James H. Forsyth, chief of the District

Surveyor's Office, had determined that Mt. Vernon Square was not one of the original seventeen reservations, but was merely a public space formed by the confluence of streets and avenues.

This argument, which proved to be crucial to the Mt. Vernon Square site's acceptance, was somewhat misleading. While it is true that it was not one of the original federal reservations, designated for open space or public buildings, and for which the original landholders had been reimbursed, the square was one of the original fifteen that L'Enfant had colored yellow and numbered on his 1791 plan. He proposed that these squares "be divided among the several states in the Union for each of them to improve....The center of each Square will admit of Statues, Columns, obelisks, or any other ornaments, such as the different States may choose to erect...." Although L'Enfant's plan for the fifteen squares was never implemented, it is clear that he designated them as special public spaces:

> The situation of these Squares is such that they are the most advantageously and reciprocally seen from each other, and as equally distributed over the whole City district, and connected by spacious Avenues round the grand Federal improvements, and as contiguous to them, and at the same time as equally distant from each other, as circumstances would admit.[31]

Nonetheless, in a January 18 editorial, the Star endorsed the Mt. Vernon Square site, noting that "...investigations conducted by the Star...raise the question whether this site may not be available for library use without violating any principle and without creating any dangerous precedent."[32]

On the next day, Noyes and Warner met with Senator McMillan, and they agreed on the Mt. Vernon Square site. McMillan amended the bill he had previously introduced at the urging of the District Commissioners to change the site to Mt. Vernon Square. McMillan himself seemed to have little understanding of the importance of the site or the symmetry of the L'Enfant Plan. The Star reported on a visit McMillan made to Mt. Vernon Square:

> He thought the building should face the west, where it would be seen to splendid advantage for a long distance on New York and Massachusetts avenues and on K street. The question whether the building should be in the middle of the square or nearly abutting 9th street is one that has not been determined....[33]

His committee report, however, showed more sensitivity to the vistas created by the L'Enfant Plan:

> Situated in the center of Mt. Vernon Square, the view of the building would be obtained from Massachusetts avenue, K street and New York avenue, and would add dignity and beauty to a portion of the city where ornamentation is somewhat

lacking.34

The bill passed both houses and was signed by the President on March 3, 1899. The bill designated the Mt. Vernon Square site, set up a library commission to oversee construction, set guidelines for the architectural competition, and required a construction supervisor.

The selection of the Mt. Vernon Square site seems to have been made precipitously. January 12, when Andrew Carnegie offered to fund the construction of the library, was the first day that the possibility of an independent site for the library arose. Exactly one week later, on January 19, the Mt. Vernon Square site was decided on. The Library Board of Trustees, and the District Commissioners, were anxious to obtain a site -- any site -- so that they did not lose the $250,000 offer from Carnegie. While the House seemed inclined to go along with the Pennsylvania Avenue site, Senator McMillan had other ideas. Senator McMillan, as Chairman of the Senate Committee on the District of Columbia, thus wielded immense power over the selection of the site, operating, as he was then, without a plan for the development of the heart of the city.

The Library Board itself seems to have been somewhat defensive about the site. In their annual report for 1900, the Trustees noted that Mt. Vernon Square was 130,219 square feet, while the Library took up only 17,307 square feet -- leaving seven-eighths of the square "untouched."[35] At the dedication, Commissioner McFarland, in formally transferring the building from the Library Commission to the Board of Trustees, noted:

> Some of us wish Congress had permitted us to have a site for the building out side of a park square, but since Congress did not see fit to do this, we have consolation in the fact that in Mt. Vernon Square the library will be central to all sections of the District....[36]

The Star too expressed regret over the selection of Mt. Vernon Square. On February 13, 1900, an editorial said,

> The city has recently lost one park, Mt. Vernon Square, as a result of an extraordinary combination of circumstances, an urgent need for free public library facilities, a sudden munificent offer of a building, the demand for a site to be quickly provided, the practical impossibility of securing an appropriation of the site at a short session all serving to force the sacrifice of this reservation in the higher interests of public education.[37]

A year later, the Star again objected:

> It is a misfortune that circumstances forced the occupation of a portion of Mt. Vernon Square as a site for the Public Library. It was a serious blunder when the pension office was located on Judiciary Square. It was an equal error when the Army Medical Museum was constructed close to the National Museum in the Smithsonian Park....[38]

After completion of the building, however, the complaints died down. The location of the Library seems today to be a brilliant move, defining vistas that were only vaguely seen before. The Eighth Street vista, not directly mentioned in the contemporary discussions of the site, is today the only vista that is an individually designated D.C. landmark.

4. The Architectural Competition

In the same congressional legislation that identified the site for the library, the library commission to oversee construction and the architectural competition were established. The Library Commission consisted of the three District Commissioners, the officer in charge of public buildings and grounds (Col. Theodore A. Bingham), and the president of the Board of Trustees of the Library (Theodore W. Noyes).

The bill also set out the competition: ten architects should be invited to compete; the competition should be judged by the Library Commission plus two other people selected by the competing architects; the winner should receive 3% of the cost of the building; and the other entrants should receive $250 each. In addition the bill also required a construction supervisor, "an officer of the Government especially qualified for the duty," who would receive 40% of his present salary, in addition to it.

At its first meeting, the Library Commission elected District Commissioner John W. Ross president and placed Bernard R. Green in charge of the construction of the building.[39] The program for the competition was drawn up by Lansing H. Beach, the Engineer Commissioner, and Col. Theodore A. Bingham, and presented to the commission on April 14, 1899.

The program announced the architects who had been invited to take part in the competition -- Alden and Harlow from Pittsburgh, Appleton P. Clark, Jr., from Washington, Henry Ives Cobb from Chicago, Hartwell, Richardson and Driver from Boston, Hornblower and Marshall from Washington, Marsh and Peter from Washington, Fred D. Owen from Hartford, W. M. Poindexter from Washington, G. K. Thompson from New York, and Wyatt and Nolting from Baltimore -- and invited others to compete as well, although the others would not be compensated. The ten architectural firms unanimously selected Henry van Brunt and George B. Post, president and past-president of the AIA, to help judge the competition, but, as the AIA Quarterly Bulletin noted, "Although two architects were on the jury they had no hand in the arrangement of the programme."

The entries to the competition were due on July 12, 1899. The commission received twenty-six entries from twenty-four participants. In announcing the selection of Ackerman and Ross, the commission stated somewhat ominously:

> After careful examination of all the designs it is found that no one can be adopted and built without serious alterations. Nevertheless, inasmuch as the design marked "13" is most acceptable, its author is appointed architect for the building.[40]

Notes to Part I

1 Star, July 19, 1899.

2 George B. Post to John Ross, July 18, 1899, Noyes Collection, Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library.

3 Ackerman & Ross to Bernard Green, August 5, 1901, Library of Congress Archives, Washington Public Library Building, Office of the Superintendent of Construction, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (hereafter OSC).

4 American Architect 86 (December 31, 1904): 1514.

5 Merrill Ann Kaegi, "The Architectural Design and Sculptural Decoration of the Washington, D.C., Public Library Building" (Washingtoniana Division, Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial Library, Typescript, 1969), 21-23.

6 Ackerman & Ross to Green, October 3, 1900, OSC.

7 Kaegi, 11.

8 Ackerman & Ross to Green, November 1, 1900, OSC.

9 Green to Ackerman & Ross, November 2, 1900, OSC.

10 Green to Commission, November 19, 1900, OSC.

11 Richardson & Burgess to Green, April 3, 1901, OSC.

12 Washington, D.C., Public Library Commission, Programme of Competition for the Washington Public Library (May 1899), unpaginated.

[13] William H. Jordy, American Buildings and Their Architects: Progressive and Academic Ideals at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1976), 321.

[14] William E. Foster, "New Ideas in Library Buildings," American Architect and Building News 51 (July 30, 1898): 38-39.

[15] Green to Commission, March 14, 1900, OSC.

[16] Green to Commission, May 22, 1900, OSC.

[17] Green to Ackerman & Ross, October 27, 1900, OSC.

[18] D.C. Public Library, Third Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1900), 9-10.

[19] Green to Noyes, September 18, 1901, OSC.

[20] Green to Noyes, September 13, 1901, OSC.

[21] D. C. Public Library, Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1899), 14; George F. Bowerman, April 14, 1906, quoted in Theodore Wesley Koch, A Book of Carnegie Libraries (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1917), 97.

[22] U.S. Congress, House, Subcommittee of Committee on the District of Columbia, Five-Year Building and Extension Program, the Free Public Library of D.C.: Extract from Hearings, 69th Cong., 2d Sess., 13 December 1926 (Washington: GPO, 1927), 530.

[23] William A. DeCaindry, "The Washington City Free Library," Records of the Columbia Historical Society 16 (1913): 35.

[24] D.C. Public Library, First Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1898), 6.

[25] Star, January 12, 1899.

[26] Warner to Carnegie, July 24, 1902, Carnegie Library Correspondence, Carnegie Corporation of New York.

[27] Carnegie to MacVeagh, December 13, 1902, Carnegie Library Correspondence, Carnegie Corporation of New York.

[28] Star, January 12, 1899.

[29] U.S. Congress, Senate, Site for Washington Free Library: Report No. 1509, 55th Cong., 3d Sess., 21 January 1899, 2.

30 Star, January 17, 1899.

31 H. P. Caemmerer, Washington: The National Capital (Washington: GPO, 1932), 31.

32 Star, January 18, 1899.

33 Star, January 19, 1899.

34 U.S. Congress, Senate 1899, 3-4.

35 D.C. Public Library, Third Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1900), 8.

36 D.C. Public Library, Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1902), 16.

37 Star, February 13, 1900.

38 Star, February 20, 1901.

39 Star, March 9, 1899.

40 Star, July 19, 1899.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This Beaux-Arts building, located at the intersection of several vistas, has a prominent central block with wings on each side that are recessed from and lower than the central block. The heavily sculptural design, the white marble exterior, and the careful location in the center of a square contribute to the monumentality of the building.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The central block measures 92'-10" (five-bay front) x 111'-5". Wings on each side measure 63'-6" (three-bay front) x 54'-10". The building has two stories plus a basement.

2. Foundations: The foundation is Milford pink granite.

3. Walls: The exterior walls are Vermont marble. The five-bay central block has pedimented end pavilions. In these modillioned pediments are classical Minerva heads. The central doorway is flanked by engaged Ionic columns. In the spandrels of the three round-arched openings are swags and garlands and medallions bearing the letter "W". In the bays flanking the central doorway, the first-floor level has a pedimented blank tablet.

4. Structural system, framing: The structure is steel-framed. The first floor is supported by masonry bearing walls and columns spanned by vaulted ceilings using Guastavino tile construction. The second floor and roof appear to be supported by the steel frame.

5. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The main doorway is panelled wood with a five-light leaded transom window. Within the round-arched opening, the doorway has a broken pediment with an elaborate sculptural grouping which features two boys with books and scrolls. The pediment is supported by scrolled brackets and has a denticulated frieze. A plaque over the doorway reads "PUBLIC LIBRARY." The doorway has a shouldered architrave.

   On the rear of the building, the entrance is recessed behind four of the slot-like openings. Now the main entrance, this doorway has modern glass double doors.

   The basement is reached by four doors. There is one under the front door, originally used for bicycles, and one under the rear door, for service. They both have segmentally arched openings with transom windows and sidelights. There are also doors in the north side of the wings. These are double doors with six lights in each leaf, transom windows and sidelights.

   b. Windows: The windows are a variety of large round-arched openings and narrow slot-like ones. In the central three bays of the central block, above the first-floor level, the windows are large round-arched openings with scrolled keystones. The wooden mullions are largely vertical. The windows are casement sash below, with pivoting sash above.

   In the pavilions the first-floor window is a round-arched opening set in a larger round-arched opening. At the second story three single-sash windows are grouped together with a common bracketed sill under which is a datestone, which reads 1899 on one side, and 1902 on the other.

   On the front, side, and rear of the wings, the main windows are round-arched openings set in a rectangular frame. The bottom part of this window is filled in with pedimented blank tablets. At the second-floor level are groupings of three

slot-like openings. These openings, in which the single-sash windows are deeply recessed, originally had lattice-like grilles over them. These grilles were removed in 1926 to provide more light and air.

On the rear of the central block the windows are dramatically different. Originally intended to light the stack area, these windows are narrow and vertical in orientation. They are broken into a general five-part arrangement. The center has four doorways with two-story windows above; this section is set off by three levels of extremely narrow windows. The sections on either side of the center have four windows, each three stories tall. The multiple-story windows have wooden spandrels marking the floors. The end sections have four sets of three stories of window, which are divided by marble spandrels (between the first and second floors) and regular wall between the second and third floors. Each third-story window, across the entire rear, has a keystone. Each second-story window has double-hung sash. The fourth-story windows, which vary somewhat in size, are single-sash and quite plain.

Basement windows of the wings are set in groups of threes. On the rear of the central block, two pairs of windows are on each side of the entrance. All of the basement windows are single sash.

6. Roof:

   a. Shape, materials: The low hipped roof is covered in a green slate.

   b. Cornice, eaves: The cornice of the central block is extremely elaborate. The frieze above the central three bays reads "SCIENCE," "POETRY," "HISTORY." The cornice has dentils and modillions. Above this is an impressive parapet which has three plaques reading "THIS BUILDING A GIFT OF ANDREW CARNEGIE," "WASHINGTON PUBLIC LIBRARY," and "DEDICATED TO THE DIFFUSION OF KNOWLEDGE." Between these are sculptural groupings of naked boys holding blank tablets.

   The cornice of the wings is much plainer, with various moldings. The cornice of the rear of the central block has dentils and modillions. Above it, the parapet is blank.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plan: The floor plan has been altered considerably. The stacks, which originally filled the rear of the central block, have been removed, and the main entrance is now in the rear. Various service rooms and the delivery desk have been removed to create a skylit gallery area. In the west wing the open shelf room and children's room have been combined into one library space, Room 107, into which a mezzanine level has

been added. The combining of these rooms was provided for in the architects' original proposal; the partition was designed to be easily removed.[1] The reading room in the east wing also has had a mezzanine level added.

On the second floor, the lecture room in the west wing has been altered and subdivided to provide offices for the Board of Trustees. In the east wing, the room is still one open space, with a skylight above. In the north part of the second floor, the stacks have been removed and the area subdivided.

The basement plan is completely changed. There is a glassed-in classroom in the center of the basement. The room in the west wing is one big room with folding partitions. The room in the east wing now holds the special collections and rare books.

2. Stairways: There are dramatic stairways on either side of the front door which turn 180 degrees at the end walls of the central block, then join at a landing over the front door, before rising again to the second-floor level. The stairway is marble with an iron balustrade and wooden banister. The stairway to the basement, located under the main stairway, is similar, but has a quarter turn when it reaches the end walls.

3. Flooring: In the main hall, the flooring is terrazzo in squares with darker smaller squares at the corners. In the gallery area of the main hall, the floor is carpeted, as it is in the rooms in the east and west wings, both floors. In the Memorial Hall on the second floor, the flooring is terrazzo in squares with a black and white mosaic trim. In the basement, the flooring is linoleum, except in the east and west wings, where it is carpeted.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls are plastered and painted in an off-white color. The walls and ceilings are richly ornamented with pilasters, columns, and moldings. The main hall, south of the original delivery space, is divided into three areas by columns and moldings on the ceilings. The denticulated cornice carries six names: "PLATO," "HOMER," and "GALILEO" along the north side and "BACON," "SHAKESPEARE," AND "NEWTON" along the south. The ceiling has rows of single lightbulbs in little plaster medallions. The square columns are fluted with a pronounced entasis, as are the pilasters which adorn the walls.

The areas leading to the east and west wings are similarly ornamented, with a denticulated cornice and lightbulbs in medallions. On the second floor, the Memorial Hall is ornamented with a denticulated cornice, above which is an approximately 4' high space adorned with panels and lions' heads, above which is a denticulated and modillioned cornice. The hall has Ionic columns and pilasters, similar to those on the first floor. There is a round arch over the stairway. The areas leading to the east and west wings have vaulted and paneled ceilings.

In the basement, the ceilings have Guastavino tile vaulting, which are textured tiles with fat mortar joints.

Originally, the interior paint scheme was much more colorful. The $6,000 scheme was designed by Albert Ross, the architect, and executed by Elmer E. Garnsey, "one of the most skilful decorative painters in New York." The scheme was proposed as follows:

Basement	
entrance hall,	
2 toilet rooms:	ivory and gray.
staircase:	Caen stone color.
First Story	
delivery room:	pilasters, columns, beams: Caen stone color; ceiling panels buff; border stencils gold; wall panels old red; borders buff and tan.
east and west wings:	walls gray olive tint; ceilings light buff.
six smaller rooms:	walls light tan; ceilings light buff.
Second Story	
staircase:	walls Caen stone; vaulted ceiling old blue.
exhibition hall:	cornice and pilasters Caen stone; frieze panels buff; wall panels green; capitals of pilasters, lions' heads and garlands in frieze and borderlines of panels gilded.
smaller rooms:	walls tan; ceilings light buff.
lecture hall:	walls gray olive; ceilings light buff.

The Board objected to the red walls of the delivery room, and presumably these were painted a more neutral color.[2]

5. Openings:

   a. Doorways and doors: The front doorway has a simple frame. The door behind the original delivery counter has a shouldered architrave. Leading to the room in the west wing are two doorways with shouldered architraves. These doors are all glass in a wood frame, as are the double doors leading to the room in the east wing.

   b. Windows: The windows are generally in modest moldings, although the windows in the east wing are grouped in one surround with a shouldered architrave.

   c. Skylights: There is an impressive skylight in the main hall, over the original delivery counter. In the center the skylight has a denticulated cornice, while the skylights to either side are set in a plainer surround.

In the Memorial Hall of the second floor, the skylight is set in three rows of ten squares, ornamented by medallions.

6. Decorative features and trim: Over the door behind the original delivery desk is a clock set in a sculptural grouping of two boys with festoons and garlands.

On the back of the tablet over the front door, so that it can be read from the stairway landing, is the following:

DONOR
ANDREW CARNEGIE

BUILDING COMMISSION
JOHN W. ROSS HENRY B. MACFARLAND
JOHN BIDDLE THEODORE A. BINGHAM
THEODORE W. NOYES

ACKERMAN AND ROSS
ARCHITECTS

BERNARD R. GREEN
SUPERINTENDENT OF CONSTRUCTION

RICHARDSON AND BURGESS
CONTRACTORS

7. Mechanical systems:

a. HVAC: The building is now equipped with central heat and air-conditioning. The equipment is suspended above the skylight. Originally, the building was equipped with a "complete steam warming apparatus, with mechanical ventilation, by which fresh outdoor air is properly tempered and furnished to all parts of the building, and a system of suitable discharge flues communicates with the two chimneys on the roof."[3]

b. Lighting: There is a mixture of fluorescent and indirect lighting. The art gallery in the main hall has track lighting, and Memorial Hall has recessed lighting. The lighting was originally incandescent, as described in the Star: "The electric lighting arrangements of the interior are complete, and the glow of thousands of incandescent bulbs gave the rooms and corridors the brilliance of day."[4]

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The building sits in the center of Mt. Vernon Square and faces south. Mt. Vernon Square is at the convergence of New York and Massachusetts avenues and K and 8th streets and measures 510' x 225'. The library is centered on the 8th Street axis.

2. Historic landscape design: Mt. Vernon Square is landscaped with winding paths and large trees. At the front of the building is a large concrete paved area with a granite exedra. The back of the seat formed by the exedra reads "A UNIVERSITY FOR THE PEOPLE." Four sets of stairs lead up to the library from the sidewalk.

   Behind the exedra, a bicycle ramp leads down to the bicycle entrance under the front door.

   The rear door is reached by granite stairs with a marble coping. Beside and below this, a herringbone brick curved driveway leads down to the basement door. The segmental arched opening under the bridge that leads to the back door has a keystone.

   In the southwest corner of the square are two public restrooms. These are largely underground, with concrete abutments and stairs leading down. The restrooms are closed and locked.

Notes to Part II

[1] D.C. Public Library, Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1899), 11.

[2] Star, September 25, 1903.

[3] D.C. Public Library, Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1902), 8.

[4] Star, January 8, 1903.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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a. Ackerman and Ross:

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b. Ackerman and Partridge:

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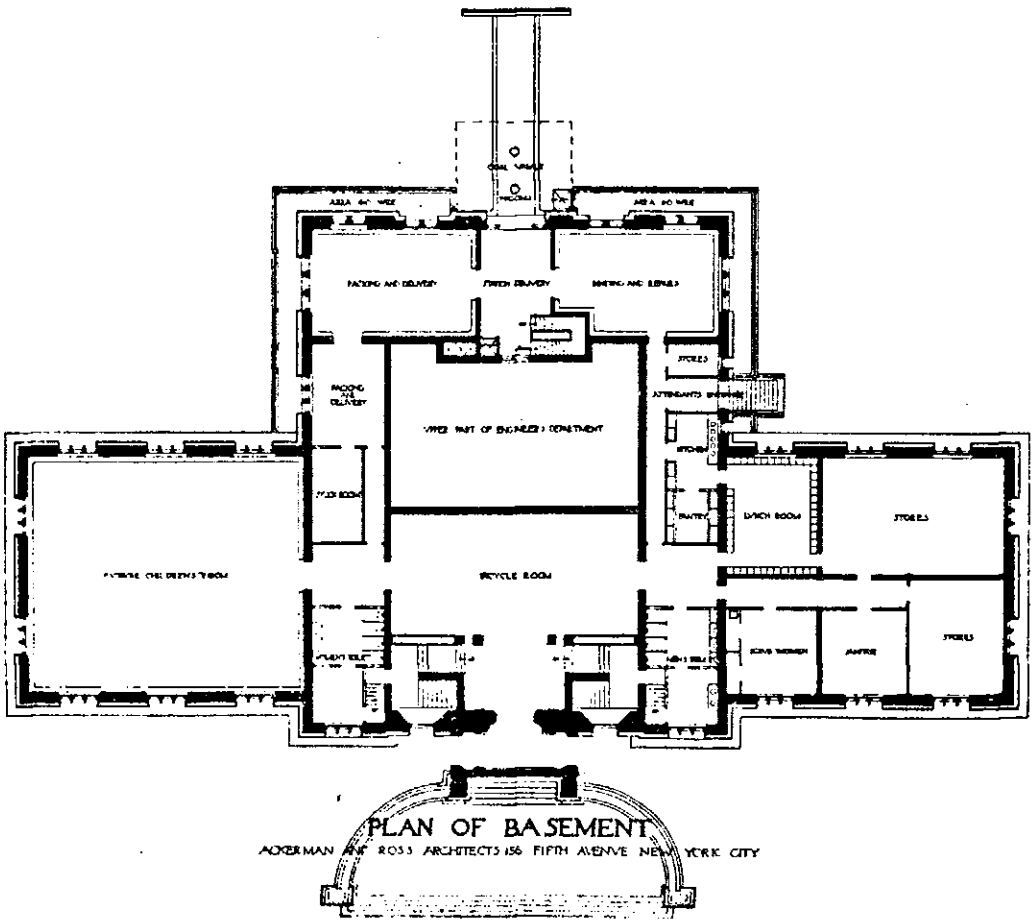
The Brickbuilder 15 (September 1906): 195. [Library in Union Hill, N.J.]

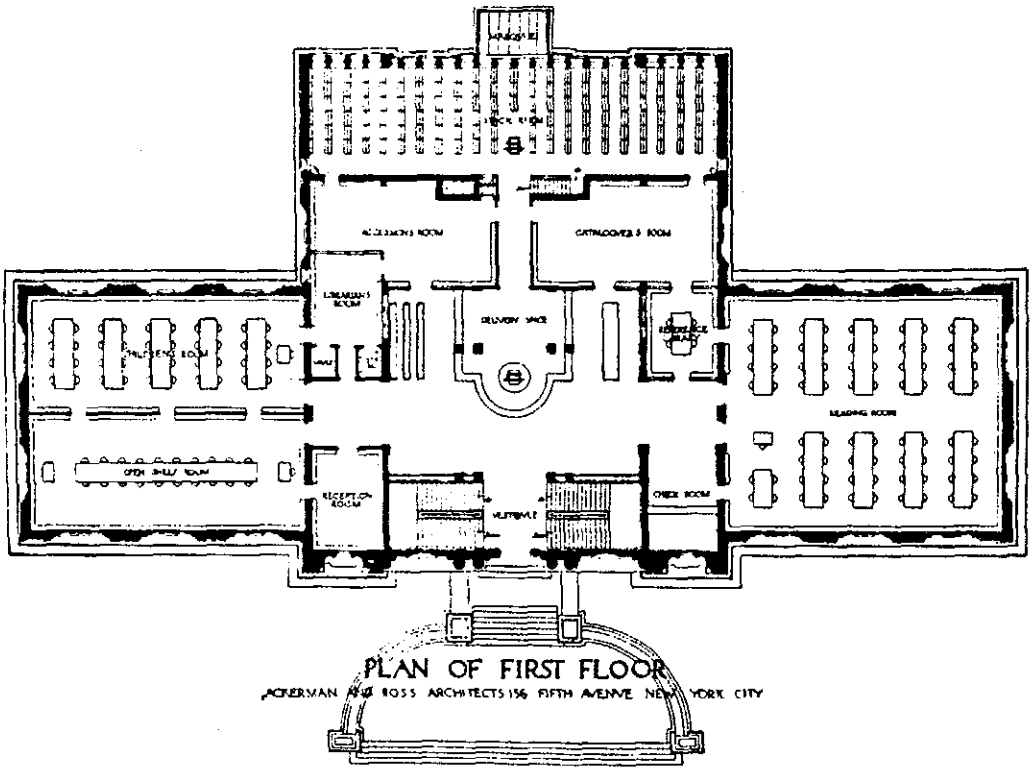
PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The recording of the Washington Public Library was undertaken in 1985-88 by the Historic American Buildings Survey, Robert J. Kapsch, Chief. The sole researcher and author of this report was Alison K. Hoagland, HABS Historian. The photographer was Louise Taft Cawood.

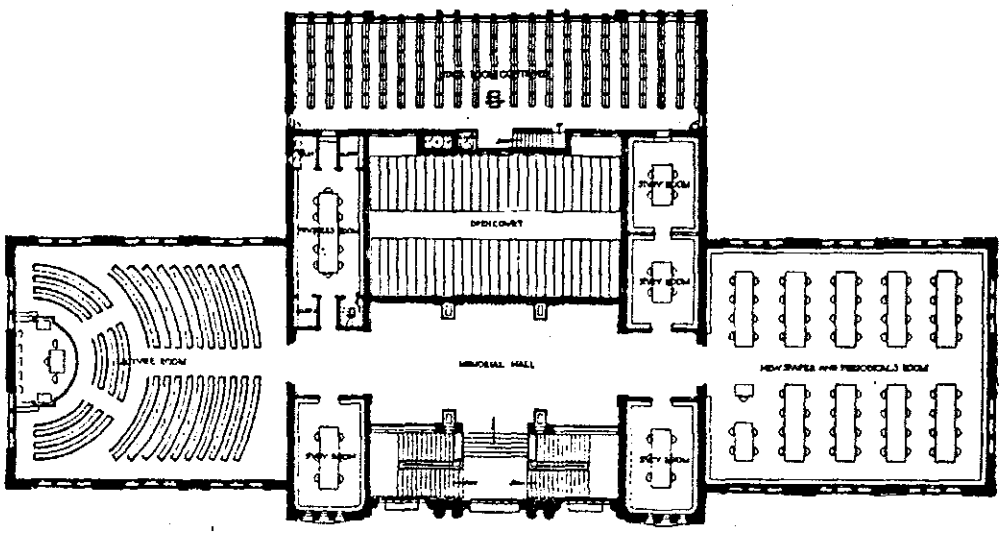
PART V. SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION

The floor plans included here are copied from the D. C. Public Library, Second Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (1899), pp. 9, 12-13.





PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR
ACKERMAN AND ROSS ARCHITECTS 156 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY



PLAN OF SECOND FLOOR
ACKERMAN AND ROSS ARCHITECTS 156 FIFTH AVENUE NEW YORK CITY